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Descriptive

Reading

ON

FLORENCE

Illustrated

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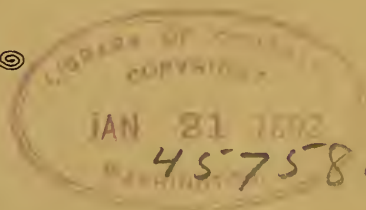
12 Lantern Slides

WILLIAM H. RAU
PHILADELPHIA
1891

A
DESCRIPTIVE READING
ON
FLORENCE

John Bartlett

ILLUSTRATED BY TWELVE LANTERN
SLIDES



WILLIAM H. RAU
PHILADELPHIA
1891

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1925

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FLORENCE.

“THOU art in the garden of the world, the home
Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree ;
E'en in thy desert, what is like to thee?
Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste
More rich than other climes' fertility,
Thy wreck a glory and thy ruin graced
With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced.”

FLORENCE, formerly the capital of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and now chief city of the province of the same name, is one of the most attractive cities of the world. While in ancient times Rome was the grand centre of Italian development, Florence has, since the middle ages, superseded it as the focus of intellectual life. The modern Italian language and literature have emanated chiefly from this source, and the fine arts also attained the zenith of their glory here. So important a part has Florence played in the development of the fine arts, that her art history is in many respects coincident with that of the whole of Italy. An amazing profusion of treasures of art, such as no other locality possesses within so narrow limits, reminiscences of a history that has influenced the whole of Europe, and the delightful environs of the city combine to make it one of the most interesting and attractive places to be found on the face of the earth.

1. Panorama of Florence.—Situated on the banks of the Arno, in a charming valley, picturesquely

enclosed by the spurs of the Apennines, who can describe the enchanting view of this art-city and its surrounding gardens? who paint the distant horizon with the blue ridge of the mountains standing out against the golden background of the western sky? Like a water-lily rising on the mirror of the lake, so rests on this lovely ground the still more lovely Florence, with its everlasting works, and its inexhaustible riches. From the bold, airy tower of the palace, rising like a slender mast, to the wondrous dome of the Cathedral,—from the old house of the Spini to the Pitti Palace, the most imposing the world has ever seen—from the garden of the Franciscan convent to the beautiful environs of the Cascine—all are full of incomparable grace. Each street contains a world of art; the walls of the city are the calyx containing the fairest flowers of the human mind.

Beautiful, blooming Florence! all is life and movement. The water gives a soft, loving reflection as the sun begins to decline toward the western heights. Green trees shine forth gaily amid the elegant houses, and splendid churches and palaces; marble statues—forms of beauty or pensive thought—meet you everywhere. The people swarm in crowds across bridges and squares, through lanes and streets; carriages are rolling along incessantly; the sun shines with summer splendor and life over the green hills and parks, amidst which Florence rests like a flower.

2. The Ponte Vecchio.—Florence is situated on both sides of the Arno, and the two parts of the city are connected by six bridges. Of the four old bridges

that span the river, the most interesting is the Ponte Vecchio, least like other bridges in the world and most enchanting. It is lined from end to end with quaint old shops, which have belonged to the goldsmiths since 1593. These shops are a sight to behold, brilliant as they are with all kinds of the most attractive jewelry that can be made of gold and precious stones. Nowhere else do we see such quantities of of turquoise, lapis lazuli, agate, jasper, onyx, and diamonds. The Florentine mosaics are especially beautiful.

The bridge is crossed by the covered corridor which connects the Uffizi Gallery and Pitti Palace. On the walls of the corridor are hung gobelin tapestries, oil paintings, engravings, and an endless number of drawings, many of them very valuable, being the works of Michael Angelo, Giotto, Leonardo da Vince, Tintoretti, and others equally famous. Pausing a moment in the centre of the bridge we are charmed with the view, set as it were in a square frame. That glimpse of sky and water and rich buildings is exquisite.

3. The Cathedral and the Campanile.—The Cathedral of Florence, called the Santa Maria del Fiore, from the lily which figures in the arms of the city, was erected with the design of being the largest and most splendid building which it was in human power to construct, and so perfect that nothing larger or more beautiful could be thought of. The dome is said to have served at a model to Michael Angelo for that of St. Peter's, and exceeds it in size. The interior of the church, though somewhat bare is very

impressive, owing to its grand dimensions. Every separate portion in the great design is in beautiful harmony with the whole, and is in itself a perfected piece of beauty.

The lofty Campanile stands near the Cathedral, complete in its lovely mosaic attire of many colored marbles, which shine in the light of the sun, so that we might fancy we saw some wonderful gigantic flowers. Of the beauty of this structure, one of our own poets sings :

“In the old Tuscan town stands Giotto’s tower,
The lily of Florence blossoming in stone—
A vision, a delight, and a desire—
The builder’s perfect and centennial flower,
That in the night of ages bloomed alone.”

On one side of the square in which the Cathedral stands is a white marble seat built against the wall, on which is inscribed “*The Stone of Dante.*” Here Dante used to sit, contemplating the building of the Cathedral, and perhaps obtaining from its beautiful proportions inspiration for his *Comedia Divina*, or perhaps watching for a glimpse of Beatrice, the sight of whom inspired him with new life. “I wonder was he ever, in his bitter exile, withheld from cursing the very stones in the streets of Florence the ungrateful, by any kind remembrance of this old musing-place, and its association with gentle thoughts of sweet Beatrice.”

4. The Armory in Podesta.—Immediately on the right of Via Proconsolo, rises a most imposing building with a most eventful history,—the Palazzo del Podesta. Begun in 1255, in 1261 it became the

residence of the Podesta or chief magistrate of the city. The building was repeatedly damaged by fire and water during the riots in the fourteenth century, but was afterwards restored and strengthened. From the end of the sixteenth century down to 1859, it served as a prison and seat of the head of police. Between this time and 1865 the imposing structure was judiciously restored and fitted up for the new National Museum, illustrative of the mediæval and modern history of Italian culture and art.

On the ground floor, most picturesquely arranged against the tiled walls and massive columns, are instruments of warfare belonging to various periods of history. Lances, spears, shields, and complete suits of armor are seen. The entire collection of weapons was formerly in the possession of the Medici family, and comprises many pieces of great worth and beauty. Not least among the interesting relics is a highly ornamented monster cannon cast in bronze dating from 1638.

5. The Pitti Palace.—The magnificent edifice of the Pitti Palace is conspicuously situated on an eminence, and has much the appearance of a castle or prison. It is remarkable for its bold simplicity, and the effectiveness of the building is entirely produced by its fine proportions. The artistic charm consists in the simplicity of the mass, the justness of proportion in the elevation of the stories, and the tasteful adjustment of the windows in the vast surface of the facade, which is 660 feet in length. The building was begun in 1440 by order of Luca Pitti, the powerful opponent of the Medici, whom he hoped to excel in

external grandeur by the erection of the most imposing palace yet built by a private citizen. The failure of his conspiracy against Piero de' Medici cost Luca the loss of his power and influence, and the building remained unfinished for more than a century.

Since the sixteenth century the Pitti Palace has been the residence of the reigning sovereign, and is now that of King Humbert when in Florence. The royal apartments, comprising some twenty or more rooms, are most beautifully furnished.

The paintings, statuary, and other works of art contained in this palace form a choice collection. The upper floor of the left wing contains the far-famed picture gallery. It consists of about five hundred works, and comprises paintings by Perugino, Andrea del Sarto, Tintoretti, Rubens, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Velasquez, and no fewer than a dozen of Raphael's works. No collection in Italy can boast of such an array of masterpieces interspersed with so few works of subordinate merit.

6. The Santa Croce.—On the spacious Piazza Santa Croce stands the beautiful church of the same name which dates back to the thirteenth century. This church is called the Westminster Abbey of Florence, and contains many monuments of striking character, among which are those of Dante, Machiavelli, Alfieri, Galileo, and Michael Angelo. The remains of Galileo and Michael Angelo rest here. On Michael Angelo's tomb there has been placed a bust, said to be a correct likeness of the great artist; guarding the door are three statues in mournful attitude, representing Painting, Sculpture, and Arch-

itecture. The position of the tomb is said to have been selected by Michael Angelo himself, that he might see from his last resting place the dome of the Cathedral, "the delight and study of his mind."

In the centre of the Palazzo stands an imposing monument to Dante, consisting of his statue, nineteen feet in height, on a pedestal twenty-three feet in height. The corners of the pedestal are adorned with four lions bearing shields, on which are inscribed the names of his most important works. Below these are carved the arms of the principal cities of Italy.

7. The Cloister Croce.—Passing through the gate at the side of the church we enter the cloisters, where every stone is eloquent of great men's deaths. The tablets are set in the wall on the left, each bearing a name famous in literature, art, or sciences, or closely identified with the history of Florence. Directly in front of us is the Capella of the Pazzi, the family which afterwards gave name to the famous conspiracy against the Medici. The entablature is supported by six ancient columns; the arch and cupola are adorned with glazed and colored lacunars. The front is decorated with a charming frieze of angelic heads.

To our right, on the other side of the cloisters is the old refectory, which contains paintings of the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Legend of St. Francis. The Tribunal of the Inquisition, which was abolished by the Grand-duke Peter Leopold, once held its sittings here. The second row of cloisters, one of the finest colonnaded courts of the early Renaissance, is now used for military purposes. In the open court, of which we can see a small portion,

there are monuments of the Alamanni, Pazzi, and della Torre families, and many modern statues by famous sculptors.

8. The Palazzo Vecchio.—The Palazzo Vecchio stands as a magnificent symbol of the bold aspirations of the ancient republic ; once the scene of its popular assemblies, the seat of the government, it is still an important centre around which cluster many memories. It is a castle-like building, with enormous overhanging battlements, and a great fortress tower, that watches over the city. We have before us a view of the outer court, which was constructed in 1434 ; the elaborate and beautiful decorations of the columns, and the arabesques on the ceilings were added in 1565, from which time date the now somewhat faded views of Austrian towns which decorate the walls. The armorial bearings above the colonnade include the *lily* of Florence, the *cross* of the People, the *eagle* of the Guelph party, the *balls* of the Medici family, and the combined colors of Florence and Fiesole. In the centre of the court, above a large basin of porphyry, is the beautiful and famous figure of the “boy with the fish.” The fountain sends up one sparkling stream, silvery alike to the eye and ear. On the floors above are the Council Halls with stately decorations ; in pictures on the walls recording the triumphs of the Medici, and the wars of the old Florentine people.

9. Monks at the Fountain.—Everywhere in Florence do you meet the dignitaries of the church ; occasionally their cardinals in scarlet stockings and

violet silk-lined cloaks, accompanied by a black clad priest; again we see bare-footed and bare-headed Capuchin monks, who wander along comfortably by twos, and betray the fact by their corpulence and rosy complexions, that one can lead a very jolly life as a Capuchin. Here and there you see a quiet thinker, sitting or walking, with his book in his hand, as solitary and undisturbed in the silent groves, as in his own study. The brothers before us are employed in attending to the household duties in the monastery. No meagre, fasting, gaunt, and wild-eyed friars are these, but jovial, round, and fat, bearing ample testimony that they well enjoy the good things of this life which are supplied to them in great abundance. Little is there about them to remind us of that great member of the brotherhood whose name is inseparably connected with the history of Florence, and who suffered martyrdom for his bitter denunciation of the sinfulness and luxury of the times. Savonarola! well art thou honored now. Thy statue is enshrined in the churches, and as we leave the Vecchio we pass the Great Fountain erected to thy honor on the site of the stake at which thou wert burned.

10. Loggia dei Lanza.—Continuing our way across the square we reach the Loggia dei Lanza, a magnificent open vaulted hall of the kind with which it was usual to provide both the public and private palaces of Florence, in order that the inmates might enjoy the open air, or participate in public demonstrations, without being obliged to descend to the street. The structure was erected in 1376, but it was not until the time of the Grand Duke Cosimo I. that

it received its present name, which is derived from his German spearmen or "lancers" who were posted here as guards. The entrance is now guarded by two sculptured lions.

On our right is the celebrated group, "The Rape of the Sabines," portraying in marble the manner in which the Romans first obtained wives; on the left is "Perseus with the head of the Medusa," in bronze, by Cellini, who also executed the statuettes and bas-reliefs on the pedestal. Among the other celebrated works contained in the loggia are "Judith and Holofernes," by Donatello; "Ajax with the body of Achilles," an ancient copy of a Greek work; "Hercules slaying the centaur Nessus;" and many antique portrait statues.

11. The Uffizi Palace.—Adjoining the Pallazzo Vecchio is the Uffizi Palace. Entering the square we behold in niches all around built in the walls, the nobles and great men of Tuscany; above them smiles the bright heaven of their native land; they now enjoy a state of tranquility and honor which was not granted them during their life time. Tall, glorious marble statues with expressive heads of great individuality and power. Among them we recognize Dante, with the energetic countenance of nobly bitter lineaments; Michael Angelo, Buonarotti, and Benvenuto Cellini, in whom rough strength is superior to beauty; Machiavelli, with a countenance devoid of beauty, but captivating from its expression of sagacity and keen sarcasm; Galileo, with a splendid head, indicative of strong concentration and deep attention to the problems of physical creation. Each one, artist, poet,

thinker, warrior, seems concentrated upon his own special calling—whence comes an indescribably strengthening and beneficial effect from being amongst them.

The first floor of the edifice contains the National Library, which consists of 300,000 volumes and 8000 manuscripts, and comprises the most important works of the literature of all nations.

Above this are the galleries containing a vast collection of objects of art. The gallery originated with the Medici collections, to which numerous additions were made by the Lorraine family, and it is now one of the best in the world, both in extent and value. We find here works of every age and every country, and to name the artists whose works adorn these walls would be simply to enumerate those who have been most famous in all parts of the world since Art first reigned supreme in Greece.

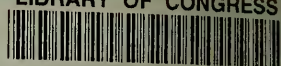
12. Triumphal Arch.—Before leaving Florence we must take one of the most pleasant drives in the city, along the broad avenue that leads to the Piazza Cavour. Driving rapidly over the smooth, even road we soon reach the spacious piazza. The first object that attracts our attention is the ancient Portal of St. Gallo, which dates from 1330. The frescoes which once adorned it are obliterated, but the gate is well preserved and still proudly rears its battlemented head.

Continuing our way around the piazza we reach the imposing Triumphal Arch, which was erected in 1738, to commemorate the entry of the Grand Duke Francis II. The arch is Grecian in style; the

entablature, which is supported by ten Corinthian columns, is adorned with figures in relief.

The fountain in the centre of the piazza makes music to our ears, from the lovely blue sky above the sun shines brightly down, and here we shall say *farewell* to Florence, in all her bloom and beauty.

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